

knocked off the rails by people whose only loyalty is to rebellion." he says. This all must be really stressful for Mark. Perhaps early retirement is in order.

The VPD has also seen fit to put the fear into Woodward's developer Geoff Hughes of the danger posed by anarchists. "Geoff Hughes said Vancouver police have warned him to be particularly wary of 'certain anarchists' – like the ones who terrorized merchants and shoppers at Pacific Centre mall last May during a protest, ostensibly to oppose the provincial government's implementation of a \$6-an-hour training wage for young B.C. workers."

- Vancouver Sun, October 28

"This is a group that has attempted to infiltrate the people who are disadvantaged and homeless. They're not interested in solving the problems of the Downtown Eastside. They want to overthrow the government." Hughes told the Sun.

By the way people are exaggerating the squatter and anarchist threat in Vancouver, you'd think the revolution was right around the corner. Then again, as John Clarke of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty has pointed out recently, the authorities are not unaware of the potential for a massive squatters movement across Canada, a potential that is beginning to be realized with the national "Give It Or Guard It" campaign and recent squats in Ottawa, Quebec City, Victoria, and Halifax, or the October 26 squatting actions in Montreal, Sudbury and Toronto, including the 3-month-old Pope Squat.

The authorities will continue to attempt to divide the movement through media lies and brutal repression, but it becomes clearer each day that they are getting scared. They're afraid for a reason.

- Insurrectionary Anarchists of the Coast Salish Territories (Vancouver)

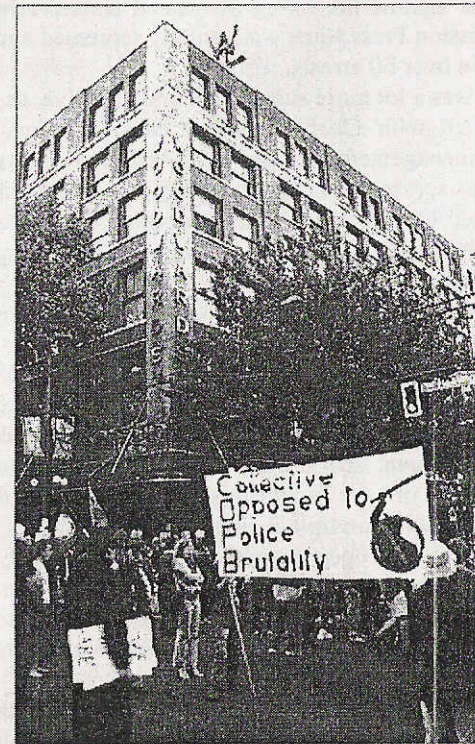
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# THE FIGHT FOR HOUSING HEATS UP IN CANADA



George Sweetman  
(OCAP, NEFAC)

## The Fight For Housing Heats Up In Canada

by George Sweetman

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This year has seen a wave of housing and squatting struggles spread across Canada from Vancouver to Halifax. Some have had limited success, while others have been brutally crushed by the state. This is a brief overview of the struggle for housing and squatters rights that many people have been fighting in Canada.

The squats this year were actually started in the summer of 2001 when the Comite des Sans Emploi opened a squat on rue Overdale in Montreal. They were then offered a deal by the city where they moved to a much larger (and more livable) building in Prefontaine. While police shut down the Prefontaine squat a few months later, the idea that open political squatting was possible in Canada touched the minds of housing and homeless activists like a flame to gasoline.

2002's first crack at an opening political squat was the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty's (OCAP) attempt at squatting the former Mission Press building in Toronto on March 22nd. Meant to be a one-night occupation in conjunction with a weekend of protest against the ruling provincial conservative party's leadership convention, the Mission Press squat was brutally repressed and evicted in a couple of hours resulting in over 60 arrests.

The next attempt was a lot more substantial, and effective, as community housing committees affiliated with Quebec's largest tenants union, the Front d'action Populaire en Reamenagement Urbain (FRAPRU), had a week of temporary housing occupations across the province in May. It was this campaign that opened the squat in Quebec City that lasted four months. The success of the squat in Quebec City was inspiring and key to kicking the "squatting summer" into full gear.

Soon the "7 Year Squat" (named as such as that's how long the building was empty) on Gilmour St. was opened in Ottawa as part of the "Take the Capital" demonstrations against the G8 meeting taking place in Alberta. The "7 Year Squat" lasted 7 days before riot police evicted the squatters. Of note is the vigorous defense and extensive barricades that squatters erected, it took longer for the police to evict the squat than it did for them to raid the fortified clubhouse of the Hells Angels. Also of note is that this eviction brought the heaviest charges with squatters charged with multiple indictable offenses.

On July 25th, OCAP then opened another squat in Toronto, this time when the Pope was visiting Toronto. 1510 King St. W. was an abandoned rooming house that previous owners and various levels of government left to rot in legal limbo where nobody technically owned it. The building was opened with a massive demonstration that had a lot of popular support and participation from neighborhood tenants. This support carried on throughout the occupation with many people putting in long hours renovating the squat and making it livable. In the end it housed between 30-50 people all of whom were homeless previously. It was open for just over three months before being shut down by fire officials. But we'll talk more about that later.

## Squatter Threat - The Black Scare

The Vancouver Sun and Vancouver Police Department (VPD) are busy stirring up a lesser, and more ridiculous version of the "Red Scare" of the past.

In several recent front page stories and articles, the Vancouver Sun has written of the threat posed by squatters and anarchists to a "peaceful", class-divided city. The squatters and anarchists must be doing something right to cause such a fuss!

An editorial in the Tuesday, October 29 issue of the Vancouver Sun declares that it is "Time to cry 'Enough!' on the anarchist squatters"

"Ever since the Woodward's squat began, controversy has raged over whether the squatters are homeless activists in search of low-cost housing or more anarchists looking for a little rabble-rousing. As the squat enters its seventh week, it looks more and more like the latter."

Surprisingly, the Vancouver Sun does not commend the anarchists who have faked homelessness successfully for more than 45 days! Apparently the Vancouver Sun editorial board cannot find the brain-capacity to entertain the idea that a person could be homeless and an anarchist at the same time. But the main intention of the editorial has more to do with lying about the identities of the homeless squatters, and denying that they are even homeless at all. These lies should be laughable to anyone who has had any interaction with the Woodward's squatters at all.

The Vancouver Police Department seems to be getting all upset about anarchists too.

The head of Vancouver's "Odd Squad" cops is hatching paranoid conspiracy theories about anarchists involved in filming police miss-conduct around the needle exchange table at Main and Hastings. In a private e-mail that the Vancouver Sun somehow got a hold of, cop Al Arsenault reports that "a well-known anarchist, as well as a street lawyer, were on hand to try and secretly film us removing this table (it appears to have been a 'bait' site in order to picture us police in a bad light)."

While we question the VPD's intelligence information as to whether this person is an anarchist or not, we definitely find his theories to be both hilarious and stupid.

Al Arsehole isn't the only cop getting himself worked up about Vancouver's revolutionaries. Constable Mark Tonner, who writes a regular column for the Province had his own words to throw in.

"Anti-enforcement types, these so-called "latte-leftists" compete to portray us as criminals in childishly tangled revolutionary language." he complains in the October 27 issue.

Well Mark, your brothers in the VPD don't make it very hard for us when they pound on school children, as they did at the recent Britannia police riot in East Vancouver. But maybe Mark was there, got a rock to the head and is suffering from short-term memory loss. We can only speculate at this point.

He goes on to whine about the complications squatters create for the police and pathetically plead for squatters and activists to accept whatever crumbs city hall decides to hand down. "It would be a shame if it (the plan for Woodward's) were

Instead of allowing us to build this dream of desperately needed services and resources for poor people's suffering under the Liberal cut cut regime, and the City of Victoria's anti-poor policies and attitudes, Victoria City Council and the police decided a multiplex development is more important.

According to City Hall, it is more important to build a sports arena for wealthy patrons who can afford luxuries like minor league hockey and second rate concert tickets. \$20 tickets let alone an average of \$80 to \$200 ticket price is far out of reach for people on welfare or with no income at all.

City Hall prioritizes a mammoth development for tourists over the health and integrity of poor and working class neighborhoods of Quadra/Blanshard, North Park and Fernwood.

Allan Lowe would rather let a city owned building sit empty for months before it is demolished, than allow homeless people to live in it, at least until it is razed to the ground.

"We, five arrestees, were confined in a police van at the police station. One person had been severely pepper sprayed - an entire canister of pepper spray had been emptied into his eyes. We yelled through an air vent demanding our release and immediate medical attention. The fumes from his pepper spray drenched clothes and face were making us all sick. Our shouts 'this area is chemically contaminated. Let us out now!' were met with police taunts -'It's just like a home!'"

"It's just like a home" a urine soaked chamber, 6x4 feet square no window, locked inside, crowded with 5 people choking on pepper spray. This is the attitude of the Victoria Police Department towards homeless people and communities fighting for basic needs and rights. They arrest us, beat us, torture us, and imprison us. Then insult our dignity with petty taunts. 1 person was released Saturday, another released Sunday and three people had bail hearing on Monday and were released.

The evening of the November 16, after ballots were counted and Alan Lowe's campaign party. The group from the Memorial Arena squat intended to make a statement to Alan Lowe that just because he won with 60% doesn't mean that he can run ram shod over the needs and rights of the other 40%. People were in jail for addressing the housing crisis in

Victoria in a tangible and reasonable way, squatting an empty building that was set for demolition. The group went to Alan Lowe's campaign party to demand the release of the 4 prisoners. People were quietly waiting to speak to Lowe, but before they could even say one word, he called in his personal security force, the Victoria Police Department, and arrested us for speaking too loudly, swearing in public (when one person said "this is bullshit" as they watched someone being arrested for no reason) and other bullshit charges. All five were released without charge. One of the arrestees asked "If the bottom line for this 'new era' is saving tax dollars, how much did it cost Alan Lowe to have 30 cops arrest and imprison us in order to avoid answering up to his shameful policies?"

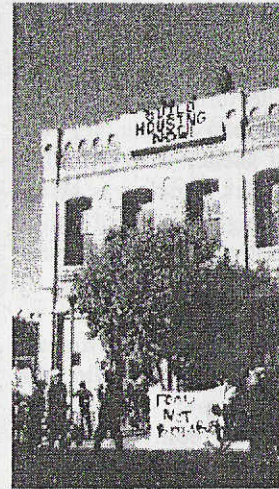
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Suddenly the squatting struggle jumped to the west coast with activists and homeless people taking over the Woodward's Department store, a building that's 10 stories high and covers an entire city block, in East Vancouver on September 14th. The building, which is owned by the provincial government and has actually been slated for conversion to social housing several times in the past, is capable of housing hundreds of people in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Canada. Evicted eight days later 58 squatters were arrested only to set up a "tent city" under the large awning in front of the building. The Woodward's tent city, as well as the fight to convert the building into social housing, continues despite two police raids, destruction of squatter's property, and more arrests.

On October 16th, a squat was opened on Pandora St. in Victoria only to be evicted a couple of days later. However, as a squatter wrote on Victoria Indymedia,



"Victory comes in steps. Victoria has never known a political squat. Taking this action was one of these steps to victory for poor people. Eventually we will win our demands and there will be enough housing for everyone. The fact that there is not housing for all who want it shows the corruption of our system that allows some to hoard incredible amounts of wealth while others are crushed beneath. "

However, probably the biggest blow to the squatting movement in Canada was the eviction of Tent City on Toronto's waterfront. Tent City was a shantytown in Canada's richest city that was founded in the mid 90's erected on land owned by Home Depot that, ironically, can't be developed due to the City's master plan to gentrify the waterfront. Over 150 squatters who lived at tent city were evicted by Home Depot and the City on September 24th. Tent City residents, some who had lived there for years, were rudely awakened by large numbers of private security and police. Activists from the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRRC) and OCAP mobilized to support the squatters, shutting down a Home Depot press conference the same day as well as occupying city council chambers and confronting the politicians and bureaucrats responsible. TDRRC later issued a call for pickets at Home Depot locations and held an information picket at a Toronto store.

As a result of this show of resistance (and the resulting bad press) the City was forced to cut a deal to save face. Evicted residents of Tent City were offered a housing subsidy so they could get apartments in Toronto's rental market, which is so overpriced that the subsidy will barely cover rent in most apartments. Despite this concession only a handful of evicted squatters have been able to find landlords willing to rent to them and the vast majority remain on the streets and in Toronto's shelter system. It's also only a "pilot" program that will be up for review in six months, which probably means that after the media frenzy blows over squatters will lose the subsidy and be back on the streets.

## Give It Or Guard It!

On Oct. 26th, 2002, there were occupations of abandoned buildings across Canada. Initiated by OCAP, the Oct. 26th housing actions happened in Toronto, Vancouver, Sudbury, Guelph, Montreal, and Halifax.

In Toronto the demonstration was met with heavy police repression with riot squads from Barrie, York region, and the Ontario Provincial Police augmenting Toronto police, including the mounted unit.

After marching confined to the sidewalk and withstanding several police attacks the demonstration made it to Sherbourne Street in Toronto's gritty east end. As we marched up the street we could see our neighborhood being torn down and hauled away before our eyes with a long abandoned rooming house being demolished. We continued on Sherbourne to Dundas where we meet up with TDRC as well as Flying Squads from the Canadian Union Of Public Employees, Canadian Auto Workers, and The Toronto Teacher's Federation. They were holding vigil at yet another long abandoned building. A few speeches were made at this point, but the day wasn't over yet.

We continued up the street to Gerrard where we tried to turn east only to be blocked by police. Instead of getting into a big fight before reaching our destination Gaetan Heroux from OCAP, and an east end shelter worker, talked about how a woman he knew died in the Allan Gardens park which was across from us. While he did so, OCAP members were going through the crowd letting people know that when Gaetan announced that the demonstration was dispersing to go to Parliament and Shutter St to defend a squat there that was occupied by OCAP members.

The ruse worked and we soon found ourselves outside of 213 Parliament Street, a building that was labeled as "surplus housing" by the City in the middle of a housing crisis! We found ourselves split between the east and west side of Parliament cut off by riot police. It was at this point that the police arrested a Ryerson student who was holding a banner reading "Ryerson against war and racism". Toronto police are fuming from a Toronto Star article, backed up by community activists and regular people, that wrote what poor and working people have always known; that the police target people of colour, especially young black men, through racial profiling.

The standoff didn't last long as the City sent the order to evict the building and clear the demonstration from the street. However, as the police were breaking in through the back of the building the activists inside the building managed to escape right through the front door. Protected by the crowd the squatters escaped arrest altogether as the demonstration re-grouped across the street leaving lines of riot police to guard an empty building from people housing themselves.

Three days later OCAP went to the City council meeting to try and address the issue of 213 Parliament being sold as "surplus housing". However the item was moved to the front of the agenda and rammed through very quickly in order to deny us the right to speak on the topic. Angered by this blatant display of disregard for poor and working people OCAP members objected and were then forcibly removed from the city council chambers by police. Before we were

it's through building radical mass-based movements based on people's daily needs, like housing, that we're going to be able to build a movement capable of defeating the politicians, bosses, landlords and cops once and for all.

## Update -

### Victoria Memorial Arena Squat November 16, 2002



On election day Nov. 16, 5 people were arrested and charged with break and enter at the closed down and boarded up Victoria Memorial Arena. And later that evening, in a community support action, five more arrests were made outside the newly re-elected Mayor, and head of the Police Board, Alan Lowe's Campaign headquarters.

The first court appearances for the five arrestees is December 20, 2002 at 9 am courtroom 126. Charges include break and enter (maximum sentence 14 years) obstruction of in-justice, and wearing a mask with intent (to what? sleep in a warm, dry place for the night?)

Please come down to court if you can, or write letters, hold forums, and make petitions support our comrades in this struggle for not only social housing, but for the right to make use of empty buildings.

The huge building had been boarded up and the interior gutted. Piles of refuse lay on the disused ice rink floor. The seating had been removed. Empty boxes lined the walls. The interior was lit, dry and heated. There were kitchen and toilet facilities. There were many rooms and seemingly infinite space. This building could house every homeless person in town and act as a community centre for the under housed living in cramped over-crowded apartments. It could serve as an office space for community groups, as shelter space for women, a detox centre/safe injection site, art space, day care, free school, food bank, soup kitchen, floor hockey for poor people... This empty building houses endless possibilities.

Instead, it now sits empty and those possibilities have been squashed by the harsh and violent response of the Victoria Police Department.

and others proved futile, forcing the group to descend upon the office of Phil Brown, head of Toronto Shelter, Housing and Support. For hours we tried to explain the reality that squatters were facing, and the city's responsibility to house people they evicted under the emergency rooming house act. Brown's response was yet another slap in the face; squatters were welcome to try their luck in Toronto's overcrowded and disease ridden shelter system.

Well, a shelter bed for one night and a couple of coffees and donuts isn't enough. As of this writing the squatters and OCAP are organizing to re-take the pope squat again, bring it up to code and move people back in. After all, OCAP's motto is "whatever it takes."

### Who's Winning The Fight For Housing?

It's hard to tell what the long-term effect of this summer of struggle will have. Certainly, the struggle for housing in Canada hasn't been this intense for many years and the links and shared experiences housing activists have made through this summer of housing occupations lays a good base to continue the fight. The squatting summer of 2002 was a significant radicalization of the housing movement in Canada, with anarchists and radical community organizations like OCAP winning not only the argument that direct action is needed, but actually winning buildings for short periods of time. At the same time we've seen the housing and anti-poverty movement organize a lot of new people in our neighborhoods and in cities across the country. It's this heightened level of radical, community based struggle that offers us the opportunity to embark on a nationally co-coordinated campaign of squatting and other actions next year. It is this type of radicalization, the type where we're not just radicalizing other activists but regular tenants, workers, and poor people, that holds the seeds for building a truly revolutionary movement based on the principles of direct democracy and direct action.

However, as there's still a lot of work to be done prior to a revolution, one concrete thing that's been pointed to as a government concession is the 630 million dollars that the Federal government announced it was going to spend on social housing this year. While this is a start it still falls far short of the amount required. For example, FRAPRU is asking for two billion dollars to be spent on social housing immediately, and that's only meant as a down payment on a longer term vision for housing in Canada.

Overall, I think that the fight for housing in Canada is just starting to heat up. More than ever we are in a position to pressure the state for concessions while building a movement against the bosses, politicians, and landlords that keep us working for 60 hours a week so we can afford to live in overpriced apartments or, if we can't make the rent, struggling to survive Canada's cold winters on the street.

As long as we live under capitalism our labour will be exploited and we will be under the thumbs of landlords or the state. The only way to get rid of the problems we're facing is to get rid of the capitalist system and the state altogether replacing it with a system where we get all the fruits of our labour and have direct control over our workplaces and neighborhoods. That system is anarchist-communism and

cleared out councilors yelled at us to "get jobs". So much for meaningful dialogue with the state.

Dialogue or no dialogue, OCAP plans to follow up on 213 Parliament and other sales of "surplus housing" in Toronto. After all, these neighborhoods are our neighborhoods, these buildings are our buildings, and we're not going to stand by while our housing is torn down and replaced by condos for yuppies.

In Ottawa, activists with the Ontario Coalition Against the Tories, and the Anti-Capitalist Community Action held a picket of Home Depot for evicting Tent City.

In Vancouver, the Anti-Poverty Committee (who were involved in the Woodward's squat) released the location of several empty government owned buildings that should either be converted into social housing or, failing that, squatted by people who need housing.

In Guelph, activists held a march through the small city's downtown before arriving at a large abandoned building, recently sold by the provincial government to a private developer, where they unfurled a banner reading: 'This should be housing'. According to the Guelph Action Network, "The City of Guelph had first right to buy the building, but did not. The building is an ideal location for affordable housing or a much needed emergency shelter. Guelph has very few emergency shelter beds, and the shelters are located far away from the downtown core, where resources people living in poverty would use are."

In the northern Ontario city of Sudbury, the newly formed Sudbury Coalition



Against Poverty held a demonstration that brought out about a hundred people. The demonstration started with speeches and a free meal in a downtown park then activists walked the picket line with locked out workers at the Sudbury Star newspaper before occupying St. Alouysius, a large unused school building. A banner was dropped from the 3rd floor demanding social housing.

In Montreal, the CLAC's housing committee organized a "guided tour" of abandoned building in the St. Henri neighborhood. They stopped at the site of the building occupation last May by the Housing Committee for St-Henri and Little Burgundy. Their next stop was 4110 St-Ambroise, an abandoned, rotting building near-collapse, that is attached to 4120 St-Ambroise, an old industrial complex. The building was targeted due to the fact that a company that builds luxury condominiums slated it for demolition. The building was occupied briefly and a banner reading "Non aux condos; des logements sociaux" (No Condos - Social Housing) was dropped from the second floor window. The demonstration then went on to the condo developer's office where they sent yuppies running to their SUV's and put them on notice. As a member of CLAC Logement said;

"Today we have occupied a building in disrepair that should be turned into



housing for people who need it. This is just a first step. We don't think people should occupy disgusting buildings; instead we are announcing to the condo developers that we consider this site to be the property of the people of St-Henri and we refuse to have luxury condos built here. If the developers continue building these condos, then we will consider them ours too and will come back to occupy clean, brand-new luxury housing as the social housing we deserve and are entitled to."

Halifax was the day's biggest success with housing activists barricading themselves in an abandoned hospital for 24 hours, winning wide community support and media coverage before being arrested by police. They were released with no criminal charges, but with trespass tickets totaling over \$1000.

A couple of weeks earlier activists from the Suburban Resistance group temporarily opened a squat in Oakville in response to the city canceling a plan to build a shelter for the homeless. Suburban Resistance along with OCAP held a march that was met with a heavy police presence that stopped the march from reaching the squat by blocking various bridges that activists would have had to cross. While police lines were pushed back in several instances they eventually held and activists were kept away from the building.

#### Pope Squat Evicted... But For How Long?

On Friday November 1st the first snowfall of the year hit Toronto, and the residents of the Pope Squat, occupied since July 25th, 2002, hit the street. Not by their choice mind you, the occupants far preferred living in their home than on the cold winter streets of Toronto where scores of homeless people die every year. The reason they are out on the street is because City, Fire Department and Police officials threw them there.

The Fire department ordered the eviction of the squat claiming that it wasn't up to code and was "an immediate threat to life". Lisa Kocsis, a squatter, responded by saying "Freezing to death on the streets is a fucking immediate threat to life!"

The eviction was the finale in an escalating campaign of harassment by the City against the squat. Earlier in the week the City shut off the water to the building. Squatters promptly turned it back on but the city came back the next day and turned it off again, this time sealing it with a special cap that couldn't be removed. A couple of days later the fire inspectors came with a throng of police and "inspected" the building. Instead of providing occupants with a list of things that could be done to improve fire safety Fire Marshal Jack Collins sent it to the owners, which is the Provincial government. The government, predictably, did nothing to remedy the situation. Collins also posted two private security guards at the building supposedly on a "fire watch".

The next time the squatters heard from Collins was on a cold Friday morning when fire officials, backed up by about 50 police officers including the mounted unit, showed up to evict. Most occupants decided to leave the building, though there was loud opposition to the eviction from the front steps resulting in several

shouting matches between squatters and police, fire marshals and the head of the City neighborhood and services committee.

The situation changed after Sam Tassew, who has lived at the squat since it was opened refused to comply with the eviction and was carried out by police. As people objected to his treatment police officers attacked a young and very vocal OCAP member, Josh Zucker, starting a big pushing and shoving match between police and activists as people tried to protect Josh from being further assaulted. In the end Sam, Josh and Lindsay Tabah were arrested. Sam was released without charges while Josh and Lindsay were charged with assault police.

The next day OCAP and squatters held a public meeting at a neighborhood drop-in. Squatters and OCAP members spoke about the harsh reality of living on the streets and how the eviction of 1510 wasn't going to be tolerated. After the



meeting about a hundred people marched to 1510, past the security guards, and started ripping off the boards that the city had placed over the windows.

As OCAP member Gaetan Heroux stated, we were at the squat not to move the squatters back in but to fix the building up to fire code so they could move back in without fear of eviction.

After renovating the building for several hours Deputy Fire Chief Terry Boyko showed up and stated that we were in violation of the order. The crowd was tense as police were on hand to arrest anyone who refused to leave. After a meeting with squatters and supporters it was decided that we would leave on the condition that we have a constructive meeting with fire and city officials the next day.

However, the meeting with Boyko didn't yield anything more than a re-statement that we weren't allowed in the building, even if we were inside to fix it up to fire code!

As this did nothing for the people facing living on the street this winter squatters and OCAP members went to city officials to try and get people housed. Visits to the offices of Chris Korwin-Kuczynski (councilor for the ward that the squat is in),